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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 001053

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN AND WHA/AND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [ECON](#) [VE](#) [CS](#)
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: DEMARCHE ON IRAN-VENEZUELA RELATIONSHIP

REF: A. STATE 61378
[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 406

Classified By: ADCM Laurie Weitzenkorn per 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On May 31st, PolCoun and PolOff met with Alejandro Solano, sub-director of the Foreign Policy Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to discuss the growing Iranian-Venezuelan relationship (Ref a). Solano was receptive and expressed concerns, particularly in the area of the loose travel documents practice of Venezuela. Solano indicated that he would bring these concerns to the Ministry of Public Security and to the head of the Immigration Department. He further indicated that the GOCR would raise any issued that could impact Costa Rica in the proper forum, if needed.

(COMMENT: We will raise the travel documents issue in a meeting with the Director of Immigration next week.) Solano also noted (as we have heard from GOCR officials in the past) that Costa Rica has virtually no ties -private or official- with Iran.

[1](#)2. (C) Solano added that Venezuelan actions continued to concern the GOCR. On the RCTV closure, for example, the MFA had prepared points and a paper for President Oscar Arias, who pre-empted the staff work by issuing his own statement on May 30. Arias's statement expressed hope that Costa Rica could maintain good relations with Venezuela, but stressed that "any time a media outlet is closed, it is a mortal wound for democracy." The President also cited the importance of "plurality, freedom of expression and many media outlets" as "essential characteristics" of a democracy. Based on the regional furor caused by Chavez's action against RCTV, Solano predicted that the issue would dominate debate at the Panama OASGA. Recalling Chavez's (as-yet unfulfilled) threat in February to close the ALUNASA aluminum plant in Esparza (ref b), Solano cautioned Costa Rica did not want to provoke Venezuelan backlash, specially with the CAFTA referendum scheduled for September.

[1](#)3. (C) COMMENT: The Arias administration continues to walk a fine line vis-a-vis Venezuela. The GOCR does not want to draw fire from Caracas (which might include additional support for the anti-CAFTA forces here), but Arias himself, to his credit in this instance, cannot remain silent in the face of what he sees (rightly) as an egregious attack on democracy. We expect the GOCR's behavior regarding Venezuela will continue to wobble between caution and criticism until after the referendum.

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